

Statement of Commissioner William C. Ostendorff
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
And the Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Safety

December 15, 2011

Thank you Madame Chairman, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Members of the Committee for this opportunity to appear before you today.

It has been nearly five months since the NRC's Near Term Task Force issued its report and recommendations and four months since our last appearance before this Committee. I am pleased to say to you today that the Commission has provided clear direction to the NRC staff on an appropriate path forward for dispositioning the Task Force recommendations and approved a set of regulatory actions that can be implemented without delay.

Since I last appeared before you in August, I have taken steps to enhance my understanding of the issues in the post-Fukushima environment by looking at measures in place at US nuclear power plants to deal with beyond design basis events and natural phenomena. In October, Commissioner Magwood and I visited the Diablo Canyon and San Onofre nuclear power plants in California. During the visits to these facilities, we looked at seismic hazards, tsunami protection, and emergency preparedness. While in California, Commissioner Magwood and I also took the opportunity to meet with the San Luis Obispo Mothers for Peace, the San Luis Obispo Board of Supervisors, and State Emergency Officials to listen to their feedback and hear their concerns. I have also traveled to the Wolf Creek plant in Kansas and the DC Cook plant in Michigan to look at measures in place to deal with station blackouts and B.5.b-like events.

Because of the importance of the NRC's post-Fukushima actions, the Commission set ambitious schedules for a series of voting papers related to the NRC staff's review of the Task Force recommendations. I commend the NRC staff for their hard work and thoughtful consideration in carrying out the Commission's direction. Over the last twenty months as a Commissioner, I have developed great appreciation and respect for the competence and professionalism of the NRC staff. Their input to the Commission's decision making process is vitally important, which is why I have voted to ensure that their technical and regulatory expertise is always included in the NRC's post-Fukushima actions. The three Fukushima related votes I have cast since our last Committee appearance have been shaped in large part by their insight.

Since the outset, I have consistently supported a number of measures that I believed could, and should, be implemented immediately. It was approximately 4 months ago, during our last hearing in front of this committee that we discussed some of those short term actions. I have also voted to support the staff's recommendations related to hardened vents for Mark II boiling

water reactor containments and instrumentation for spent fuel pools. I have also pushed to make the station blackout rulemaking a high-priority item.

There have been reports in the media that suggest that the Commission is “slow-walking” and delaying the recommendations and impeding post-Fukushima actions. These statements are inaccurate and misleading. We are not dealing with simple “go or no go” decisions. Instead, these are complicated, highly technical matters requiring focused consideration and responsible decision making. With each recommendation, the Commission faces the difficult challenge of ensuring that the NRC’s post-Fukushima actions do not displace already ongoing high safety significance and high priority work. The senior level steering committee established by the Commission to oversee the implementation of the Agency’s post-Fukushima actions has already provided us a logical prioritization for implementing the Task Force’s recommendations. In short, at this stage, I am comfortable with where we are as an agency on Fukushima related actions.

I appreciate the Committee’s oversight role and I look forward to your questions.